The world situation has experienced great changes since we entered into the 21st century. Radical development of science and technology made the world quite small and even become a “global village”. The modernized transport system and advanced telecommunication technology have gradually surmounted a geographical obstacle separating people from each other, and integrated all parts of the world into a whole.

Dialogue among the nations with different civilization is of particular importance in such a world situation. The dialogue is necessary not only for promoting mutual understanding, international cooperation, peace and stability but also for learning from each other, so as to make civilizations meet the requirements of the new century. If we regard the clashes of civilizations as being unavoidable, and then replace the dialogue with confrontation, it will necessarily lead to the revival of the Cold War, then the world will lose its peaceful days. And the development of civilizations will be ruined.

Some cardinal principles, or that is to say, “dialogue ethics”, should be acknowledged by all sides taking part in the dialogue among different civilizations in order to enable it to go smoothly. I would like to take the liberty to propose the following ideas for consideration.

Firstly, the global awareness should be set up and the world should be viewed as a single entity. Willing or unwilling, we must live together on the Earth. Astronauts verified by naked eyes how humanity came into close contacts in their homelands when they observed our planet from the outer space for the first time. This confirmed the existence of oneness and interdependence of humanity. And this is a basis on which the dialogue among different civilizations will be both necessary and possible. In the past, there was a view that it was difficult for people from different regions to communicate with each other, just as British poet Rudyard Kipling said in his poem “Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet “. So long as we should change such narrow-minded and closed mind in the first place, we shall be able to have the successful dialogue among various civilizations. It should be pointed out that an insurmountable barrier which separated people of different ethnic groups would no longer exist in the contemporary world.

Secondly, recognizing the oneness of humanity will never mean denying the diversity of humanity. And the unity of humanity is the unity in diversities. Throughout history, it was mankind who created all civilizations, and to some extent, it reflected the common value of humanity, and showed the common feature of human nature. However, as these civilizations came into being and evolved under the specific geographical environments and historical conditions, they had their own peculiarities and differences from others. Just as we admit that all people are equal ever since their birth, we should also recognize that all civilizations created by human beings are also equal. And it is hard to tell which is better and which is worse; which is greater and which is tinier. All of them are components of the human civilization as a whole and contribute equally to it. The dialogue among civilizations should be one among equal subjects. The time when some people attempted to dominate the world with one civilization has gone forever. What is more important is that the advanced industrialized nations can’t impose their civilizations on other nations as a universally
applicable pattern. Every nationality has right to preserve and develop its own civilization, and choose its own suitable way of development according it is historical and cultural traditions and concrete conditions.

Thirdly, the dialogue among civilizations need to create a friendly atmosphere of mutual understanding in which all sides taking part in the dialogue will respect each other, cherish good wills and adopt friendly attitudes towards each other. This is an important condition for making the dialogue smoothly. I appreciate what American writer Ralph Emerson said, “The only way to have a friend is to be one”. It is hard for the dialogue to be successful if taking the other side as a competitive adversary or even a potential enemy other than equal partner and friend. As for the civilizations unfamiliar to us, we should get rid of prejudice and preconception, and carry out careful and in-depth research, completely understand their real meaning, learn modestly and absorb their achievements and advantages. Every nationality should be proud of its civilization and love its cultural conditions, and at the same time it should be sober-minded to treat the disadvantages and shortcomings in its own, and never fall into blind arrogance and cultural narcissism.

Fourthly, the tolerant and generous manner should be advocated while making the dialogue among civilizations. Difference in civilizations should be recognized and permitted. It is especially necessary to learn how to respect what is different from oneself. We all live in the environments of different civilizations, and have different economic and social systems with different historical and cultural backgrounds, values, religions and social customs, therefore, it is impossible to ask all to be uniform and accept single standard. It is widely said among the Chinese people “Seek common ground which reserving differences” which means an effort of seeking something in common with others, and laying aside disputes temporarily, reducing and clearing up the differences through dialogues and peaceful discussions, and searching a possible solution which will be accepted by both sides. Even if we can’t reach a consensus, we would rather choose waiting and tolerance as as to avoid the intensification of contradictions and the clashes of civilizations. German writer Gotthold Lessing proposed in his “Nathan der Weise” that people with different religious beliefs should have tolerance and respect to each other. Today, this idea still has a great inspiration to us.

I believe we will achieve great success after a period of common efforts if we can adhere to the above-mentioned principles in the dialogue among civilizations. It will not only contribute to promoting the advancement of civilizations of humanity, but will be of great help to the development and enrichment of every civilization itself. Civilization is not a self-asserting, self-contained and self-sufficient entity. It requires getting nutrition and new vitality from outside through the dialogues and exchanges in order to go from strength to strength. The development of Chinese civilization in history is a good example.

It is well known that Chinese civilization traces its history back to ancient times, and never has been broken off during the past thousands of years. Its formation and development have experienced a long process. It has grown up step by step through contacts, communications and collisions with other civilizations. The famous “Silk Road” by land and “Silk road of the sea” served as a bridge connecting China with Western Asia, Central Asia and Europe in ancient times. The “Silk Road” not
only promoted the international trade and commodity exchanges, but also linked civilizations in different regions and expanded cultural exchanges. The Han and Tang Dynasties in Chinese history were the most prosperous and energetic period of the “Silk Road”, and also the most active and fruitful period for Chinese civilization to absorb the cultural elements from the outside. At that time, many outstanding achievements in Indian, Arabian, Persian and European civilizations were introduced into China. They strongly propelled the development of Chinese civilization. More important, the introduction of Buddhism from Indian exerted a tremendous influence on Chinese ideology and culture. Around the 2nd century B.C., Buddhism was introduced into China’s Xinjiang region, now Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and then into China’s hinterland in 2 B.C. thanks to the frequent exchanges between monks of China and India, and due to a vast amount of translations of Buddhism scriptures and long-term in-depth research on Buddhism ideology, Buddhism became finally the most influential religion after several centuries of the spread of Buddhism in China of that time and it adapted itself to Chinese social conditions and cultural tradition. So, Buddhism came rooted in China, and a number of branches of Buddhism with Chinese characteristics appeared. After the Song Dynasty, Confucianism, which had occupied the leading position, all the way evolved into the New Confucianism and became the dominant ideology in Chinese feudal society after absorbing many elements in Buddhism. Buddhism not only influenced Chinese philosophy, but also deeply engraved upon the fields such as literature, poetry, music, architecture, sculpture, painting etc. It has been in harmony with Chinese traditional culture. Chinese Buddhism also has exerted great influence on the neighboring Korea, Japan, and Vietnam through cultural exchanges. Thus, we can say that the spread and evolution of Buddhism is a glaring example of interaction produced by the dialogue and exchanges between civilizations.

Another more recent example is the spread and influence of Western civilization on modern China. Western ideology, science and technology were introduced into China much earlier, if counting the period of Christian missionaries entering into China such as Matteo Ricci as far as four centuries ago. But owing to the policy of closing China to the rest of the world in the Qing Dynasty, ideological and cultural exchanges with Western countries were suspended for a long time, and formerly advanced China began to lag behind the European countries in industry, science and technology and culture during this period of time. By the 19th century, the Chinese people had begun to realize their backwardness and to learn from the West for searching truth of saving the nation because of the intrusion of foreigners and various failure in the Opium War and other previous warfare. Western philosophy, economics, political science and sociology were introduced into China besides science and technology, and a lot of famous works were translated and published. The theories of Darwin, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, etc. Produced a great impact on Chinese intellectuals. The last but the most important is that the theory of Karl Marx was introduced into China and widely spread. The New Culture Movement (1915-1919), or May 4th Movement of 1919 with a slogan of “science and democracy”, which changed the image of modern China took place under the strong influence of Western ideology.

The birth of New China was closely related to Western ideology, and especially to the spread of Marxism. In the recent 20 years, China has carried out the reform and open policy. Being open to all countries, China actively absorbs all the results of civilizations from the outside world, and its great
success in economic construction and social development attracts worldwide attention. The experience of China shows that enhancing the dialogue and exchanges with foreign civilizations, learning and using the successful experiences from foreign nations for reference, and absorbing what is useful to itself will better development its own civilization. In the meantime, a nation must not copy and follow blindly foreign civilization but should have its feet firmly planted in its own traditional civilization so as to decide which accept and which not on the basis of its concrete conditions and requirements. In doing so, it can enrich and develop its own civilization. History testified if a nation loses contact with reality of itself and blindly copies others will be bound to fail.

The new century provided us with both challenges and opportunities. Let us seize the opportunities and meet the challenges, do our best to make a new and a greater contribution to the development of human civilizations, to peace, democracy and progress of peoples all over the world.